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FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FROM THE AMBASSADOR

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF SECRETARY GATES TO KOSOVO
ON OCTOBER 7, 2008

Classified By: AMBASSADOR TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Mr. Secretary: It has been a difficult but in many ways successful seven months since Kosovo declared its independence on February 17. Though we spent much time planning for the possibility of large-scale population flows after the declaration and took precautions lest the independence move sparked outright conflict between Kosovo and Serbia, none of this has taken place. Instead, with our strong support and encouragement, Kosovo has weathered a series of provocative and sometimes violent actions taken by Serb hardliners, demonstrating through patience and restraint that it is a responsible member of the international community and an eager aspirant for eventual inclusion in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Acknowledging Kosovo's achievements, 47 of the most important countries in Europe and elsewhere have recognized Kosovo, though the pace of further recognitions may be slowed by Serbia's unfortunate decision to refer the question of Kosovo independence to the International Court of Justice. We hope that Macedonia and Montenegro will shortly join the group of recognizers, despite significant pressure to the contrary from Serbian officials.

12. (C) Kosovo's temperate line is in many ways due to the leadership of President Sejdiu and Prime Minister Thaci, two men of very different backgrounds and political sentiment who chose to make common cause at a critical time for Kosovo. The two formed a coalition government just prior to independence, an arrangement that has held steady despite historical animosities and considerable mistrust between their two parties. Your visit to Kosovo, following on your July discussions in Washington with these Kosovo officials and their meeting with President Bush, will be seen as a continuing vindication of Kosovo's moderate approach. Such visible support from Kosovo's strongest ally will help fend off growing domestic criticism -- from dissatisfied members of the governing coalition and from the vocal opposition -- that Kosovo leaders have not been assertive enough in establishing control over Kosovo's rebellious Serb-majority north or fending off Serbian encroachments on Kosovo sovereignty.

13. (C) And those encroachments may well persist, even under the new, pro-European government of Serbian President Tadic in Belgrade. The outgoing Serbian government under Prime Minister Kostunica engineered a policy of full ethnic separation in Kosovo, physically intimidating local Serbs into abandoning jobs in Kosovo's once multi-ethnic police force and municipal administrations. Serbia held its own illegal municipal elections in Kosovo despite warnings from the UN that such a move violated UNSCR 1244 and moved rapidly to emplace parallel institutions in Serb-majority areas

throughout Kosovo. Serbia also backed open violence by the thuggish and criminalized Serb leadership in Kosovo's north, which ordered the destruction of two northern border gates and the subsequent March 17 attack on UN and KFOR peacekeepers.

14. (C) While Tadic has made significant steps on key issues of importance to the West, including on ICTY commitments, he has pursued a policy in Kosovo not materially different than that of his predecessor. Serbia continues to assert the authority of parallel Serb municipal authorities throughout Kosovo, sowing the seeds of potential conflict in areas where Serbs and Albanians live side by side, as in the large mixed ethnic enclave of Strpce in Kosovo's extreme south. Tadic's Serbia has refused to restore customs operations at the two northern gates, resulting in a rash of fuel smuggling and organized crime in northern Mitrovica. No Kosovo Serbs have yet been permitted by Belgrade to return to Kosovo institutions. Most disturbing, and potentially the most problematic for future stability, Tadic and his foreign minister Jeremic still refuse to accept the mandate of EULEX, the EU rule of law mission in Kosovo. With EULEX now in the process of deploying, and the prospect growing that policing in Kosovo will end up in a geographic and ethnic division of labor between the UN and the EU, Kosovars are increasingly worried that partition may once again become a viable reality.

15. (C) The Kosovo government remains prepared to engage in quiet diplomacy with Serbia should the opportunity present itself, and has accepted UNMIK mediation with Belgrade to reopen the sensitive courthouse in north Mitrovica with international UN judicial personnel. Kosovo has also held open those positions in the police and public sector that

were once occupied by local Serbs in anticipation of any signal from Belgrade to the Kosovo Serb community that they are free to resume a more collaborative approach. You can impress upon Sejdiu and Thaci once again the imperative to maintain outreach to their minority communities and implement fully those obligations they undertook to the Serb population under the plan developed by UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari.

16. (C) Kosovo's leadership did a good job in appointing the new Kosovo Security Force (KSF) minister, Fehmi Mujota, a former parliamentarian who has worked well with the NATO civilian team helping to put together the KSF ministry and the KFOR-led military group leading the effort on KSF standup and selection of security force personnel. We anticipate that by the end of 2008, the existing Kosovo Protection Corps will be able to end its activities with dignity and pave the way for the formal establishment of the KSF. We have undertaken to supply the new force with uniforms and contribute a modest amount to the NATO trust fund to encourage other donors, as well as provide funding for equipment for the new KSF ministry. Minister Mujota will undoubtedly thank you for the hands-on support and guidance of the United States, in close cooperation with NATO. He may also ask you about the possibility of Kosovo's inclusion in SEDM and other regional and Euro-Atlantic defense fora over the next months and years.

17. (C) Sejdiu and Thaci will almost certainly tell you, as they have before, that U.S. troop contributions in Kosovo remain essential, particularly since U.S. forces alone are trusted enough by Serbs and Albanians alike to maintain peace in one of the most volatile parts of Kosovo. Kosovo leaders will also express to you their belief that only the United States can provide the kind of lasting leadership in Kosovo and the region that is necessary for prolonged stability. Frankly, we agree. While many in the EU and most notably the "Quint" countries have been vigorous in pushing through Kosovo's independence, the intensified problems we predict over the next few months -- especially those surrounding Kosovo's north, where Serb extremists could try to block the deployment of EULEX police this fall -- may easily lead some queasy Europeans to back away from their commitments and settle for a partition-like outcome that has been adamantly opposed by Kosovars of all political persuasions. The United

Nations, as well, though "reconfiguring" and downsizing its presence here, has shown a negative tendency to retain certain important authorities, under severe pressure from the Russians in support of Belgrade. If Kosovo is to succeed as a long-term proposition -- and it most certainly can -- our sustained engagement is necessary to bolster European resolve and take a firm line with the UN on reducing its presence in Kosovo. This meeting with you will help reinforce the sense that Kosovo is moving forward and imbue Kosovo's leadership with a renewed sense of confidence as they prepare to face the many challenges ahead.

KAIDANOW